SUBJECTS

The Deacons, Too, Ride by Night

" If blood is going to be shed, we're going to let it run down Columbia Road — all kinds. We are not going to send Negro blood down Columbia all by itself." The Deacons, Too, Ride by Night

THERE usually is a touch of ceremony in a cross-burning by the Ku Klux Klan. A carload of Klansmen drives into a Negro neighborhood and selects a lawn, gets out and plants the cross in the dirt, sets it afire and then drives away in solemn satisfaction.

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BYLINE
By ROY REED

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formed in Monroe, N. C., had got out of hand and kidnapped a pair of white people as hostages during a racial conflict.

WITH the Deacons and their organization, the advocates of armed defense have a symbol and a rallying point.

The importance of the Deacons at the moment is not in their numbers but in their psychological impact on both whites and Negroes. Observers have noticed that the presence of the Deacons in a town reduces open harassment and night riding, as in Jonesboro. It also tends to raise tension, as in Bogalusa, La., where a strong Klan and a growing chapter of Deacons threaten to collide in open fighting.

The Deacons drew their first blood this summer at Bogalusa. Already, they had opened fire twice on white night riders, once at Bogalusa and again at Jonesboro in the spring. On July 8, during a civil-rights protest march, a Bogalusa Deacon pulled a pistol in broad daylight and put two bullets through a white man who attacked him with his fists. The white man almost died.

Far from dampening the spirit of Bogalusa Negroes, this foolhardy shooting seemed to stir their passions higher. A few nights later, 400 Negroes at a civil-rights mass meeting leaped to their feet in a delirious ovation when Charlie Sims, the president of the Bogalusa Deacons chapter, was introduced. A. Z. Young, a taxicab owner and president of the Bogalusa Civic and Voters League and himself a Deacon, said a few days later, "If blood is going to be shed, we are going to let it run down Columbia Road—all kinds, both white and black. We are not going to send Negro blood down Columbia all by itself, that's for sure."

PART of the Negro's task in his struggle for equality is to convince the nation, and particularly the white South, that he is competitive, that he has will and backbone. The Southern white man has always been awed by his own ferocity, and an ample literature attests to this violent and martial nature, a nature that has shown itself in ways as varied as the lynching of Negroes to wildcat invasion plots against Cuba.

But many whites have deceived themselves into believing that viciousness and a will to fight are Caucasian traits, that the Southern Negro, although exposed to the same turbulent influences, is docile, unaggressive and martially inferior. That overlooks a mountain of facts, not the least of which is the phenomenal homicide rate among Southern Negroes. As authorities such as Thomas F. Pettigrew of Harvard have pointed out, both races in the South have a special taste for violence.

To prove his mettle, the Southern Negro in recent years has relied mainly on nonviolence, placing his body at the racist's disposal to show that he is tough enough to take it and big enough not to hit back. The significance of the Deacons is that some

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